

Neighbors in the News

Courage & Determination

Show support for our neighbor, Kara Paige,
at the Angel Fund Sale - September 25 & 26

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CORRESPONDENT

It has been a difficult year for Kara Paige, to say the least.

Diagnosed with "Stage II Plus" breast cancer in January, the South Burlington resident has only started to feel like herself again in the last few weeks.

Breast cancer is a frightening diagnosis for anyone, but at 37 years old, Kara weighs just 75 pounds and has been confined to a wheelchair with Spina bifida since she was a child; a birth defect that involves the incomplete development of the spinal cord or its coverings.

"She's pretty atypical because she's young to have [breast cancer] and she already has a disability," said her mother Carmine Sargent.

Throw in unexpected brain surgery, a broken leg and a serious allergic reaction to her medications and you start to get an idea of what the past ten months have been like for her.

Then there's the fact that her younger sister, Abby Paige, was also diagnosed with a very early stage of breast cancer several weeks after Kara. And yet, to speak to her, there is no trace of self-pity or defeat, only a quiet and humble determination.

"I heal well," she said, "I wouldn't say I let things bother me."

"I think Kara should be honored for coming home after she was diagnosed and saying, that 'I'm going to beat this' and maintaining that determination when I think I would have given up," said her mother.

Doctors began her treatment with a round of chemotherapy. An uncomfortable treatment for most patients, Kara found that the chemo made her sicker than most. After a trip to the emergency room, the doctors found that a shunt she had in her brain from years before, was not working properly.



Kara Paige, right, and her sister Abby Paige.

And "it hadn't been for years," Kara explained. The faulty shunt required brain surgery.

A week later, as she was recovering from the surgery, her leg, weakened from osteoporosis, broke as she was rolling over in bed. This required another week in the hospital to mend.

Then of course, there were the pills. Kara was taking an anti-nausea medication prescribed to chemo patients, but soon developed a serious allergic reaction called dystonia.

The doctor's took her off the medication cold turkey leading to a few weeks of severe sickness as her body adjusted.

"I was throwing up for about a week constantly," she recalled.

In July she chose to have a double mastectomy, reducing her chance of the cancer returning to three percent.

Today, she and her sister, who lives in Montreal, Canada, are cancer free, and little by little Kara Paige is beginning to heal, even finding time to volunteer at both the Fletcher Allen Hospital and the Senior Living Development in Burlington.

One sign she is getting better: "She said that she's hungry," said Sargent, noting that it has been a while since her daughter had any sort of appetite.

Sargent feels like she is beginning to recover as well. "I feel like I'm getting over it now too. I've never felt so sad in my life. It was a combination of sadness and terror that both of my only two children had breast cancer," she said, noting that she couldn't have gotten through it without the support of their friends and family.

Anne Corley, a retired teacher from South Burlington High School (SBHS), is one family friend who wanted to help.

Corley, who has survived two bouts of cancer herself, organizes benefit yard sales each year to support charitable organizations or individuals with cancer. She is holding her 14th Angel Fund benefit yard sale soon—Friday, September 25 and Saturday, September 26, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., 80 Kirby Road, South Burlington—and will donate most of the proceeds to Kara Paige.

"She's a magnificent individual," said Corley, who had Kara in her English class at SBHS. Although Corley had not been planning a Fall benefit sale this year, she immediately changed her mind when she heard about Kara's battle with breast cancer.

"I've had a lot of phone calls," said Corley, "People are very excited that we're doing something for Kara."

The benefit sale and the support Kara has received from friends and family is a testament to how her strength has touched those around her.

Her mother noted that her ability to accept her illness is what helps her to fight it.

"She embraces her illness and incorporates it and then gets rid of it," said Sargent, "I think a lot of people spend too much time fighting and arguing with their bodies ... I've learned that from her, we have to take

what we have and say: 'This is a part of me, now how am I going to get rid of it?' She seems to have the capacity to do that. She doesn't fight with herself."

Kara is already making some plans for the future. She mentioned the possibility of a trip to Washington D.C; a place she visited over twenty years ago on an eighth-grade school trip.

"I would like to go back," said Paige, "At the time when I went back in eighth grade, not all of the places there were [handicapped] accessible, so I didn't get to see everything that my classmates got to see. And now I guess everything has been redone and it's all been made handicapped accessible now."

For information about the Angel Fund Benefit yard sale to benefit Kara Paige, please call Anne Corley at 864-6316.

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